

True tribute to the races

Alberta has a rich automotive history as evidenced by the great historic display at this year's Calgary International Auto and Truck Show.

Lesser-known, but just as rich is the history of racing in this province, not something many of us may be aware of.



Harry Pegg
Motoring

Richard McDonell of Red Deer has set about setting that oversight straight with a new book called *The Speediest Land Traveller, A History of Alberta Auto Racing*.

If you don't recognize the first name, it's because he answers to "Dick" most often. That's what his business card as "Motor Racing Historian" says. On

the flip side, he's Richard of the Reserve Fund Planners of Red Deer.

I know him as a mighty fine history writer. Others know him as a fantastic racer of IMCA Modifieds and a few other classes.

But it's the book that's the thing. This is as close as you're going to get to a complete history of auto racing in this province from the first race on July 4, 1906, in Calgary (four years after the first car came to the province).

It's an unusual historical work because there's a sense of humour at work here. Of course if you talk to legends like **Frank Jannett**, you can't help but come away with some funny stuff.

Dick writes that a scheduled 30-minute interview with Frank ("for background") turned into more than four hours and an entire chapter.

His tales run from Barney Oldfield's barnstorming days to the Model T Fords, sprint cars, sports cars, stock cars, modifieds, rally cars and drag racers.

But it's more than just cars. It's about the race tracks that have come and gone over the years in all areas of the province.

Most of all, it's about the people involved in the sport: Drivers, mechanics, track builders, promoters, builders, innovators — even politicians like **Gordon Taylor**, who was bitten by the drag-racing bug to the point he ordered major thoroughfares shut down in order to stage races. (Can't you just imagine doing that now?)

It's about the great ones, the nearly great ones and the also-rans who have built the sport in the province.

I've been waiting for this book for ages.

Dick spent two years interviewing people and writing.

"I interviewed 92 people and spent I don't know how many hours in archives and newspapers," he says.

Why did he undertake the task?

It all started when he retired from racing after winning the IMCA Modified championship at Race City.

"I simply did not want to lose contact with the remarkable people in the sport."

The title?

It's a quotation from the Red Deer *Advocate* in July 1917 about what McDonell believes to be the first auto race held in that city.

The book is published by Granville Island Publishing and you can find it at Reynolds Alberta Museum in Wetaskiwin or on the net at www.alberta-auto-racing.reservefundplanners.net as well as Gee and Gee Racing (a sprint car dealer) in Nisku, Race Car Products, run by **Leonard Vaselenak**, at the gift shop at Race City in Calgary.

At \$27.95, it's 286 pages of racing nostalgia.

Thank goodness somebody has written it down.